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Degeneration of Agriculture in Soviet Estonia

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AGRICULTURAL CHAOS IN SOVIET  
ESTONIA

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Crop Catastrophy Threatens in Estonia

The crop situation in Soviet Estonia is showing a disastrous trend. On the Tallinn radio it has been reported of late how hundreds and thousands of workers and employees from the cities have been sent by force to the countryside to try to save whatever can be saved. The Tallin radio reports also that miners from the oil shale district have been sent to the kolkhozes. Up till now the oil shale district had been considered most important in Estonia. The fact that the miners have now been sent to the kolkhozes indicates that the crop situation must be very serious.

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On 31 July 1951 Tallin radio announced that the amalgamation of the present small kolkhozes into a big mighty combine is now practically accomplished. There are now 1,055 agricultural kolkhozes. Each consists of an average of 100 former farmsteads. A kolkhoz barely averages 2000 hectares, of which more than 750 are arable land. In each big kolkhoz there are on an average 120 cows, 50 hogs, 40 sheep and 350 chickens.

In addition there are in Soviet Estonia 85 fishery collectives (according to the publication Rahva Haal, in future referred to as RH, of 31 July 1951), which are mainly concerned with fishing, but which also contain a small amount of arable land, and 86 \*sovkhozes\* (RH of 15 May 1951), that is, state farms. These latter are made up of a few larger model farms, which the Soviet authorities have not allowed to be joined with the kolkhozes but which the State has taken over directly.

Of all arable land 98 percent has been collectivized, according to official statistics (RH of 31 July 1951), that is, they are either part of kolkhozes or sovkhozes. The remaining 2 percent of arable land still remains in the form of individual farms. which, according to present information, are usually very small and located in forests, or far from the bigger villages.

Heavier agricultural machinery, such as tractors, sowing machinery, harvesting machines and threshing mills, have been gathered in state tractor stations, from where the kolkhozes can rent them after duly signing an agreement and paying compensation. At present there are in Soviet Estonia 61 such state tractor stations (RH 13 May 1951). In addition there are six State soil-

conservation stations (RH 20 July 1951), which on payment carry out larger drainage jobs for the kolkhozes and sovkhozes.

The kolkhozes and the tractor stations are controlled by the agricultural department while the sovkhozes are under the sovkhoz department. In addition there is a supervisory board for soil-improvement and a construction board for the kolkhozes, which are directly under the Council of Ministers, that is, the cabinet. Of these the former is in charge of the work of the state soil-conservation stations and practically everything connected with them, while the latter is in charge of the planning and building of so-called kolkhoz-centrals (Agricultural cities).

For six years now it has been completely impossible to get an even approximately objective picture of the condition of agriculture in Soviet Estonia. From 1944, that is, from the time of the second Soviet occupation, up to the end of 1950, the Soviet authorities published no figures about the area of the land under cultivation, about crops, number of livestock and livestock production. They only published percentages, which were supposed to indicate the gains made within agriculture during one year, but as a basis for comparison they took the war summer of 1944 or sometimes 1945. But in 1944 in some parts of eastern Estonia practically no grain was planted, in some parts of western Estonia the grain was not harvested in the fall, and many cattle herds roamed in forests and on roads near the front. With such a statistical method one could of course point to great gains in each post-war year. But it was difficult to rely even on these percentage figures, as, strangely enough, they fre-

quently failed to tally; sometimes it was stated that the planted area had increased ten percent, another time a twenty percent increase was mentioned for the same year. One therefore gained the impression that these percentage figures, which were presented for propaganda purposes, were taken from the air.

It was only at the end of 1950 and the beginning of this year that, for the first time, it became possible to find out the true conditions of agriculture in Soviet Estonia. Ivan Kabin, the new all-powerful secretary of the Central Committee of the Estonian Communist Party, introduced at the Party conference on 6 December 1950 a five-year program for the development of agriculture in Soviet Estonia (see RH 15 December 1950). Later on in January the Council of Ministers and the Central Committee of the Party jointly issued an ordinance regarding the agricultural Five-Year Plan (see RH 26 January 1951). This program, as well as the Plan, contains a few absolute figures, which enable us to obtain an idea of the true conditions. Since the publication of the above, a few further absolute figures have cropped up by way of being mentioned by the Tallinn radio and by the publication Rahva Hall. It is probable that the figures mentioned in the Plan and in the program are correct. If they are not correct, then the Soviet authorities have exaggerated them somewhat for purposes of propaganda. Therefore, when we use these figures as a base in the discussion below, we will probably present the present situation of agriculture in Soviet Estonia in a better light than is warranted rather than the contrary.

The greatest surprise of the Kabin program came when Kabin said: "The main task ahead of us is to increase the production of wheat and other grains so that the Republic after four or five years

can be completely self-sufficient in this respect". In other words the Republic will no longer have to import grain. This is also stressed in a leading article in Rahva Haal of 15 December 1950, and the same basic thought is also expressed in the introductory section of the Five-Year Plan. But neither Kabin nor Rahva Haal, utter even a single word on why Estonia, which, before the Soviet occupation, was completely self-sufficient in grain, and exported a considerable amount of bacon, eggs and butter, now has to import grain. However we shall obtain an answer to this question below where we consider in some detail how, under Soviet protection, the planted area as well as the production per hectare has changed.

#### THE AREA OF ARABLE LAND

In accordance with the program presented by Ivan Kabin special emphasis for the next five years is to be placed on such work as the clearing of bushes from fields, drainage and cultivation. For this purpose special ground improving detachments are to be organized at the 30 State tractor stations, in addition to the already existing State ground-improving stations (RH 18 April 1951). As a result of this soil-improvement work the whole planted area should, according to the program, be increased 24 percent. Neither the present size of the planted area, in hectares, nor the proposed size by 1955, are mentioned in Kabin's agricultural program.

However, a few absolute figures were mentioned in the Five Year Plan. According to them there are to be 539,000 hectares under grain in Soviet Estonia after a five year period, 510,000 --about 95 percent-- in kolkhozes, 25,000 in sovkhoses. If the increase is estimated at 24 percent, the area presently under grain amounts

to 434,000 hectares.

If we discount the greater part of Petseri Province and the small strip on the east side of the Narva river, which areas no longer belong to Estonia but are a part of the Russian SSR, the 1939 grain area in Estonia, before the Soviet occupation, was approximately 560,000 hectares. From this we can deduce that at present more than one-fourth of previously arable land is used for cattle. We can arrive at the same conclusion in another way as well. If we figure that, as previously mentioned, each kolkhoz has on an average 750 hectares of arable land and that the arable land of all the kolkhozes combined is about 95 percent of the total, then the total arable land in Soviet Estonia must at present be about 831,000 hectares. In 1939, however, the arable land of the same territory amounted to about 1,058,000 hectares. Consequently about 242,000 hectares, or almost one fourth, must be fallow.

It follows that the ground improvement plan presented with such great fanfare in reality is merely a plan to cultivate the arable land, which under the Soviet regime has lain wasted. Through illegal channels reliable information has reached Sweden, once in 1949, and again in 1950, that some of the old arable land is now being used for cattle and that in some places even brush wood has started to grow on it. And, probably by mistake, the following information has now been published in Rahva Haal of 4 August, which concerns the oft-praised model kolkhoz "Bol'shevik" in the Valga district: "....among this year's grain fields there were many fields, which for more than ten years have been lying fallow and now are covered with dense brush."

Kabin also mentioned in the agricultural program that the goal to have an arable acreage as large as before the war has not yet been reached - "due to sabotage by the kulaks, who have neglected to plant some of the ground". It is difficult to understand how the result of the kulaks' sabotage can be felt many years afterwards, as not a single "kulak" is left. It is known that at present 98 percent of the total arable land is collectivized and Rahva Haal has many times written that the whole kulak class is destroyed.

#### YIELD PER HECTARE

In accordance with the Five-Year Plan, the yield per hectare in the kolkhozes should by 1955 amount to the following: fall rye 18-20 hundredweight, fall wheat 19-20 hundredweight and spring wheat 18-19 hundredweight; in the sovkhozes the fall rye should yield 24 hundredweight per hectare. (one hundredweight=50 kilograms). The yield per hectare must therefore at present be less. No figures are given to indicate how small the yield is in reality.

When the country was independent before the Soviet occupation the fall rye in Estonia yielded on an average 26.2 hundredweight, the fall wheat 27.2 hundredweight and the spring wheat 19 hundredweight, all per hectare. Thus, according to the Five Year Plan, the crop per hectare in the kolkhozes will by 1955 approach pre-occupation standards only as regards the spring wheat; as far as fall wheat and fall rye are concerned, the yield will on the other had not even be three quarters of the yield before collectivization.



### THE AMOUNT OF DOMESTIC ANIMALS AND POULTRY

No figures have been published as to the present number of horses in Soviet Estonia. There is no mention of horses even in the above Five Year Plan for agricultural development. It may be possible that this is a state secret. In descriptions of a few model kolkhozes in Rahva Haal, the number of horses is an approximate idea of their number. One thing, however, is certain. The number of horses must be considerably less than in 1939. It is not inconceivable that it only amounts to half that of 1939, as there were then more than 210,000 horses in the present territory of Soviet Estonia.

Nor have direct figures been published about the number of cattle. But considering the information given about animal production, the approximate number of cows must be less than half of what it was in 1939, when there were more than 445,000 cows in the present territory of Soviet Estonia. We arrive at the same conclusion another way. If we estimate that each kolkhoz has an average of 120 cows, as mentioned earlier, and that about 75 percent of the kolkhoz families own one cow (in each kolkhoz there are on an average 100 families according to RH, 18 April 1951), and if to this is added 5 percent for the areas outside the kolkhozes, we get an approximate amount of 216,000 cows, that is, less than half the amount in 1939. According to the Plan for improving agriculture the number of livestock in the kolkhozes should be increased 90 percent by 1955. Consequently, the number of cows in 1955 will not even come close to what it was in 1939, particularly since the number of cows that individual kolkhoz farmers may own themselves, cannot increase 90 percent, if they can increase at all.

Nor have figures been published about the number of hogs. The bacon production, however, indicates that the number should be about one third of what it was in 1939; at that time there were more than 422,000 hogs within the present territory of Soviet Estonia. If we take as a basis the figures given for the kolkhozes, as we did regarding cattle, and estimate that each kolkhoz family has one pig, we get 166,000 hogs, that is, about 40 percent of the amount in 1939. According to the Five Year Plan the number of hogs in the kolkhozes should by 1955 have increased 120 percent; even so the result is less than in 1939.

No figures are given about the number of sheep. In the Five Year Plan it is only said that the amount by 1955 should be increased 73 percent. Using the same method of calculation as we applied to cattle and hogs, and presuming that each kolkhoz family has up to two sheep of its own, the total result is only 265,000 sheep. In 1939 there were over 650,000 sheep in the present territory of Soviet Estonia.

It is only with respect to poultry that it is possible to estimate the present amount on the basis of figures in Kabin's above-mentioned agricultural program. According to this there were, as of 1 November 1950, 249,000 head of poultry in Soviet Estonia. At present the amount is probably somewhat bigger. In 1939 the number of head of poultry on the present territory of Soviet Estonia was about 1,600,000, that is, more than six times larger. According to the Plan the amount of poultry should be increased 267 percent by 1955. Consequently the amount, according to this plan, will not even be half of what it was before the occupation.

In discussing the program for developing egg production Kabin said verbatim: "the 1950 Plan for the hatching stations has been exceeded. 475,000 chickens have been hatched, which would have adequately guaranteed the fulfillment of the Plan for developing poultry care during 1950, but the lack of chicken feed and poor handling caused a great number of deaths among poultry". Thus by 1 November there were only 35.7 percent of the poultry, which according to the Plan, there should have been. This fact is a striking example of the kolkhoze system and of what actually happens to the execution of the Five Year Plans for agriculture.

The frequently mentioned Five Year Plan for the development of agriculture among other things pledges, the kolkhozes to "a determined fight against the loss of poultry by death."

#### ANIMAL PRODUCTS

Kabin's agricultural program shows that milk production in 1950 was on an average 1,600 to 1,700 kilograms per cow per year in the kolkhozes. This is considerably less than in 1939, when the average figure for the whole country was 2,187 kilograms and for cattle stock under constant veterinary control as much as 2,950 kilograms. As the cattle stock in the kolkhozes at present is under the continuous care of veterinary experts, the annual milk production per cow for the past year should really be compared with the last mentioned figure, 2,950 kilograms. According to the Five Year Plan for development, each cow in the kolkhozes should in 1955 give, on an average 2,750 kilograms of milk, which is 200 kilograms less than the figure for controlled stock in 1939.

The agricultural Plan among other things, aims at a  $2\frac{1}{2}$  fold increase of the butter production of dairies during the next five years. Thus, by 1955 it should be possible to produce 22,000 tons of butter for sale. Consequently the production of butter marketed at present must be about 8,000 tons, that is, about half of the 1939 annual production; at that time the dairies located on the present territory of Soviet Estonia produced about 16,000 tons of butter, of which about 13,000 tons were exported. One should, however, remember, that in 1939 the farms produced butter in fairly large volume for their own consumption and also partly for domestic consumption. Nowadays the whole milk production of the kolkhozes goes to the dairies. And furthermore it is hardly likely that the kolkhoz peasant himself may use as much butter as the farmer of 1939. Considering all these circumstances the difference between the current butter production and that of 1939 must be considerably greater than the above figures seem to indicate.

The production of bacon must, according to the Plan, be increased four times. Thus by 1955, 38,000 tons of bacon should be produced for marketing. It follows that at present about 9,500 tons of bacon are being produced for marketing in 1939. The present Estonian territory produced about 28,000 tons of bacon for marketing -- almost three times as much as at present. In 1939 Estonia exported 16,000 tons of bacon. Furthermore one must take into account that the farmer in 1939 certainly was more likely to consume bacon than the kolkhoz farmer of today. The discrepancy between past and present bacon production must therefore in reality be still greater.

The production of eggs for marketing should, according to the Five Year Plan, be increased as much as 50 times, so that in 1955

50,000,000 eggs will be marketed. At present only 1,000,000 eggs are marketed annually in Soviet Estonia. As a comparison it may be mentioned that in 1939 the egg production in the present territory of Soviet Estonia amounted to about 160 million eggs, of which 29 percent, that is, about 46,400,000 were exported. The total of eggs produced for marketing in 1939 is not mentioned in the statistics, but the egg production for marketing must in any case have been much more than 50 times the present, as more than 46 million eggs could be exported. And consequently it was also larger than is planned for 1955.

#### DISORGANIZATION WITHIN AGRICULTURE

Finally, we should briefly mention the general disorganization of agricultural work, which appears to have spread increasingly, particularly in recent years, that is, beginning with the period when the farmers were forced into the kolkhozes. In 1950, reliable information was received through illegal channels that part of the hay and grain crop had not been harvested on the kolkhozes and was in the process of rotting. This year hints in the same direction have been made in Rahva Haal y way of warning that what happened last year is about to be repeated this year. A Tallinn Radio broadcast of 7 June 1951 to agricultural workers said clearly that each year fields are left unharvested to a remarkable extent. Because of this, many kolkhozes have had severe difficulties in maintaining their cattle over the winter. In June of this year even the Central Committee of the Communist Party stated in a decree issued by the plenary session: "We must not permit a recurrence of the mistakes and deficiencies of last year in bringing in the harvest. At that time the harvesting work in a few districts in our republic was not

satisfactory because the mechanical equipment was not put in order in time, and great crop losses resulted because this equipment lacked proper supervision. Losses were mainly due to the fact that harvesting was not started at the right time and dragged out too long; as a result of this the grain was allowed to remain in the fields too long and the kernels fell from the ears; because threshers and threshing mills were wrongly adjusted much grain was left among the husks and straw; because reapers were allowed to cut too high or the grain was cut negligently with simple harvesting machinery, large quantities of ears were left in the fields; in the binding of the sheaves, in transporting them to the grain stacks and because of delayed threshing and the fact that barns were not put in order and arrangements were not made for drying, considerable loss and damage to the grain was sustained (RH of 24 June 1951). Furthermore, the above decree notes about the current year: "Many ... leading officials have not drawn the necessary conclusions from mistakes of last year when, due to lack of fodder in many kolkhozes, cattle died and the productivity of the animals declined sharply."

The leading article in Rahva Haal of 10 August 1951, permits us to make certain deductions about the extent of disorganization. This article says that, because of last fall's "losses" it has been necessary to discontinue giving 2 kilograms of grain per work-day to kolkhoz farmers in Paide district. As, according to information published in the same newspaper, each kolkhoz member received an average of  $2\frac{1}{2}$  kilograms of grain for fulfilling a daily norm in 1950, in addition to other wages, this means, in other words, that almost half of the grain paid to the kolkhoz members rotted in the fields. If there had been no losses, each member would have received for

one so-called standard day not  $2\frac{1}{4}$  but  $4\frac{1}{2}$  kilograms of grain. Through compulsory sales the State takes, its share from each kolkhoz, regardless of whether the grain has been harvested or whether it is still lying in the fields, rotting.

And in Rahva Haal Karumaa, the chief agronomist for the Paide district, tells the readers to learn from last year's mistakes. At the same time he gives, for the first time, a survey of these "mistakes", that is of the extent of disorganization within the district. Karumaa's article informs us that not only half of the grain to be given in payment to kolkhoz farmers, but in many kolkhozes as much as half of the entire crop is still in the fields. He writes as follows: "Last year the loss of grain in the kolkhozes, according to careful estimates, amounted to as much as 50 percent, and on some few fields to even more... In many kolkhozes the storm beat the over-ripe rye to the ground, and four to five hundredweight of grain per hectare were lost... Poorly erected grain shocks were thoroughly drenched, and soon the grain sprouted... Due to poor handling and control the grain soon got heated in several kolkhozes and then started to mildew. In some kolkhozes, as in Uus Kevade, Murrang and Uhendus, some of the grain was thus completely unusable.

Rahva Haal also mentions that in several kolkhozes cows died last winter due to lack of fodder (for instance see its issues 21 and 29 June of this year), which the above-mentioned decree by the plenary session of the Central Committee of the Communist Party had already noted.

### SUMMARY

The foregoing has shown that in Soviet Estonia at present about one quarter of the previously arable fields are not being tilled. One might presume that it would be the poorer part of the arable land, which is lying fallow and where the brushwood has been allowed to grow. The average harvest on the arable land in use should thus be greater than the average harvest for the whole country before the war. The Soviet's own figures however indicate the opposite: the average harvest per hectare is at present considerably less than before the Soviet occupation. Furthermore, part of the hay and grain crop is not harvested, but is allowed to rot in fields and meadows. Cattle care shows an even greater decline. The amount of cattle is less than half the amount before the occupation, and the average milk yield of the cows has considerably decreased. The amount of hogs is about one third, the amount of sheep less than half and the amount of chickens about one sixth of the corresponding amounts before the occupation.

It is now seven years since war raged in Estonia, and in this period the losses agriculture sustained by the war should have been overcome. The condition of agriculture seems at present to be even worse than immediately after the war, in 1945 and 1946, when there were no kolkhozes yet. From this we can only conclude that the collectivization of agriculture has caused this decline and disorganization, because it has deprived the farmers, who have now become kolkhoz slaves, of their former joy in working and of their desire to improve themselves and get ahead.



The other reason for the agricultural disorganization seems to be the shortage of labor, especially of male labor. Comparatively more men than women have fled abroad or have been deported to Russia. Many men have also voluntarily accepted work in mines and factories in order to escape the kolkhozes. The magazine Eesti Naine recently noted, among other things, in its July issue that, in the case of the Abja district, Estonia's most fertile agricultural region "most of the kolkhoz members are women".

THE END